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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PRETORIA 002886

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SUBJECT: SOUTH AFRICA'S EMOTIONAL ATTACHMENT TO CUBA

REF: PRETORIA 1935

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Donald Teitelbaum. Reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶11. (C) SUMMARY. South Africa's relationship with Cuba remains close, based largely on Cuba's support for the ruling African National Congress during the anti-apartheid struggle. Despite South Africa's rhetorical support for principles of democracy and human rights, the SAG is highly unlikely to criticize or even question the Cuban government's repressive policies. Two binational commissions meet regularly at the Deputy ForMin and ForMin levels, and 18 SAG departments have official cooperation agreements with their Cuban counterparts (although many joint projects are on paper only). The elaborate system of formal consultations consumes enormous bureaucratic energy, although SAG working level officials appear to realize that the diplomatic activity is accomplishing very little on the ground. Trade between the two countries is minuscule at less than \$4 million per year. The next Joint Binational Commission, to be chaired by the two ForMins, will be held in South Africa in November. END SUMMARY.

Historical Ties

¶12. (SBU) The governing African National Congress (ANC) has close and long-standing ties to the Government of Cuba. The Cuban Government provided training and funding to the ANC during the anti-apartheid struggle, and a number of ANC leaders spent time in Cuba during the struggle. Cuban names will be inscribed on the Wall of Remembrance at the new Freedom Park being built in Pretoria because of the Cuban role in "combating imperialist forces," particularly in the Angolan war, and the "open support Cuba gave South Africa in the difficult time of apartheid."

¶13. (C) South Africa consistently supports Cuba in international fora, helping to block consideration of Cuba's human rights record at the UN Human Rights Council. In a January 29, 2006 joint communique, South Africa "expressed its support and solidarity to Cuba's struggle against the U.S. blockade." South African and Cuban officials constantly travel between their countries. Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) Deputy Director Annelize Schroeder for Cuba and The Andean Community (protect) commented to PolOff on July 22 that it's nearly impossible to keep track of the South African delegations traveling to Cuba on "fact-finding missions," many from provincial and local government,

although the trips are largely tourist visits with little real business accomplished.

¶ 14. (SBU) The Friends of Cuba Society (FOCUS) is active in South Africa and occasionally protests in front of the U.S. Embassy in Pretoria and U.S. Consulates in Cape Town, Durban, and Johannesburg. Several high-profile South African leaders, including Willie Madisha, leader of the major trade union federation COSATU, joined the most recent October 5, 2006, protest at the U.S. Embassy demanding the release of the "Cuban Five." FOCUS held its 2nd national conference in Potchefstroom in February 2007, attended by 116 delegates from all nine provinces.

Joint Consultative Mechanism Held in Havana

¶ 15. (U) South Africa has two formal binational mechanisms with Cuba: (1) a DepForMin-level meeting, called a Joint Consultative Mechanism (JCM), and (2) a ForMin-level Joint Binational Commission (JNC) for the Economic, Scientific, Technical and Commercial Cooperation. Cuba is the only country with which South Africa has two formal cooperation mechanisms.

¶ 16. (C) DepForMin Aziz Pahad and DepFinMin Jabu Moleketi traveled to Cuba July 10-11 for the 5th session of the JCM. Pahad met with his counterpart, DepForMin Bruno Rodriguez, as well as ForMin Felipe Peres Roque. The Pahad trip went "very well," according to DFA's Schroeder, who accompanied the delegation. Pahad and Rodriguez discussed Cuba's chairmanship of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). Schroeder

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said that South Africa has been pleased by Cuba's leadership of the NAM to date. The Cubans have "reenergized" the NAM structures and are working well with key members of the Movement, which Schroeder noted is particularly impressive given Cuba's poverty and relative lack of capacity.

¶ 17. (C) Schroeder said that cooperation between the two governments is strong, with 18 different South African Government departments theoretically working with the Cuban government. Some of these cooperation projects are active, while many (perhaps even most) exist only on paper. Until recently, the health sector had been a major area of cooperation. According to the SAG Department of Health, 470 previously-disadvantaged South Africans have traveled to Cuba for medical training, 171 have already returned to South Africa, and 91 have qualified as medical doctors. Ambassador Pieter Swanepoel, DFA Director for Mexico, Central America, The Andean Community & The Caribbean (protect), told PolOff July 31 that it is not cost effective to send South Africans to Cuba for medical training, so this program will soon wind down. The Government of Cuba no longer sends doctors to South Africa to work in disadvantaged communities, since many decided to remain in South Africa following their service (and the SAG supported their legal right to do so under South African law) (reftel). The newest significant area of cooperation is in the transport sector, where Cuba will train up to 18,000 South African technicians, although Swanepoel was skeptical about the targets (and the project in general).

The transport project may be launched around the upcoming Joint Binational Commission, Swanepoel said. Education and science are also areas of active cooperation.

Effective Propaganda

¶ 18. (C) The trip to Cuba in July for the JCM was the first for Schroeder, a close Embassy contact who is a voice of reason on most Latin American policy issues. Nonetheless, Schroeder was completely taken in by the "charm" of Cuba, swallowing the Cuban Government's propaganda hook line and sinker. She

stated that the poverty in Cuba is caused by the U.S. embargo, and asked PolOff when the USG would change its "archaic" policy. Cuban officials took her to meet with a political neighborhood committee, which Schroeder explained is how the Cubans "express their democratic will." She did observe that officials did not want to discuss the health of President Fidel Castro, only noting that he had been "very sick," but was better now.

Planned Joint Bilateral Commission

¶9. (C) South Africa will host the next meeting of the Joint Bilateral Commission (JBC), likely in November. This session, which will be chaired by ForMins Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma and Felipe Peres Roque, will be the fifth since the Commission's establishment in 2001. The last JBC was held in Havana in September 2005. DFA's Swanepoel noted that the JBC originally met each year, but that the workload was simply too much in relation to the actual accomplishments. A significant number of ministers from both Cuba and South Africa will participate in the discussions.

¶10. (C) The Department of Trade and Industry will set up a trade pavilion, costing about Rand 1.5 million. According to DTI Manager for the Americas Desk, Cobs Pillay, the Department did not/not want to set up the pavilion, as trade between the countries is minimal. (NOTE: Bilateral trade is, in fact, minuscule. So far in 2007, Cuba ranks as South Africa's 171st largest export market -- immediately below Laos. Total South African exports to Cuba amounted to Rand 1.7 million (about \$250,000) in 2006. Imports from Cuba amounted to Rand 22.9 million (about \$3.4 million) that same year. END NOTE.) In addition, Cuba still owes South Africa debt for a DTI-financed purchase of engines. However, the Department of Foreign Affairs viewed the trade pavilion as good politics and pushed for it to keep the political relations intact.

Comment

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¶11. (C) Cuba holds a special place in the hearts of the ANC-led South African Government from former President Mandela down through the ranks, based largely on Havana's support for the ANC during the anti-apartheid struggle. ANC leaders are also drawn to the socialist ideal of Cuba, even though the SAG itself long abandoned its socialist past in favor of classic neo-liberal economic policies. Because of the ANC-Cuban history, South Africa is highly unlikely to criticize or even question Cuba's repressive political environment, despite the obvious contradiction with South Africa's espoused democratic values. The elaborate system of formal consultations between the two countries consumes enormous energy in the SAG bureaucracy, although we note that working level officials appear to realize that all the diplomatic activity is accomplishing very little on the ground. We suspect that the political cooperation and rhetorical support will continue, but over time the SAG will quietly and slowly pull back on the more technical and time-consuming areas of cooperation.
Teitelbaum